

## HEPATITIS C

Hepatitis C is caused by a virus that infects the liver. The hepatitis C virus can be found in human body fluids such as blood, semen, vaginal secretions and menstrual blood. Most people who get hepatitis C will have the virus in their body for their entire life and can pass it to someone else, even if they are no longer sick. Anyone who shares needles during injectable drug use or has unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sexual activity may get the hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis C can also be spread by transfusion of blood containing the virus, however blood supplies in the United States have been screened for hepatitis C since 1992. Hepatitis C cannot spread by casual contact such as shaking hands, hugging or sharing food or drink.

### How do I know I have hepatitis C?

It can take two weeks to six months from the time you get hepatitis C until you feel sick, but most people get sick six to nine weeks after they come in contact with the virus. Signs that you may have hepatitis C include feeling very tired, no appetite (don't feel like eating), stomach pain (feel like throwing up), vomiting, diarrhea, low-grade fever, sore muscles and joints, things don't taste or smell right and, later in the illness, yellow skin and eyes and urine that is dark in color. Many people have no signs they have hepatitis C, but they can still pass the virus to others.

### What do I do if I think I have hepatitis C?

Go immediately to your health care provider. They will ask you questions about how you are feeling, what your daily life behaviors have been and they will take a blood sample to be tested. You may get some medication to treat hepatitis C. Health care providers may suggest a plan to help your body fight the infection such as limiting your activities and getting a lot of rest until the signs go away. Women using birth control pills should consult their physician right away about further use. Drinking fruit juices and eating a balanced diet also helps. Your health care provider may put you in the hospital if you are very sick or are throwing up a lot.

### Is hepatitis C serious? Yes!

There is no cure for hepatitis C. A person who has the virus may continue to have the infection or may have recurring infections (get hepatitis C infections over and over) throughout their life. Hepatitis C may not make you as sick in the beginning as other forms of the hepatitis virus, but about one-half of the people who have hepatitis C will develop liver disease.

### What about my sex partner?

Your sex partner(s) should also go to their health care provider and be tested. Safer sex methods should always be used.

### How can I avoid getting hepatitis C?

- Do not share drug injection equipment (works, or drug cookers).
- Do not share tattoo equipment or needles.
- Have sex with only one person who is not infected who only has sex with you.
- Use latex condoms correctly every time you have any sexual contact.
- Decide not to have sex – it's the only 100% sure way of avoiding hepatitis C and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- When you use drugs and alcohol it's hard to make good decisions about your sexual activity...be safe.
- Remember: Anyone who is sexually active can get a sexually transmitted disease – including HIV!

### Where can I learn more about hepatitis C?

Call your personal health care provider or district health office. For referrals and additional information contact the National STD Hotline at (800) 227-8922 or for local Idaho Referrals and information the Idaho CareLine at (800) 926-2588

